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REVOLUTIONARY NOTES

CONCERNING

Nazareth, Friedensthal and Christian's Spring.

COMPILED BY HENRY A. JACOBSON.

[Read at the Annual Meeting of the Moravian Historical Society, September 26th, 1877.]

It would seem fitting in these years, when antiquarians all over the land are busy in establishing the truth of matters and events as they existed and occurred a century ago, for us to perform the same service in behalf of our church and community.

An examination of the Church Diaries of those times is at first productive of disappointment; for they are mainly a monotonous record of daily church services, of admissions, rejections, marriages and deaths, more like the history of a family, than of a community forming part of the body politic. In truth, the brethren of those days wrote their brief records without much thought of the use they might be to the future historian.

However, here and there, there are allusions to the stirring events of those days, whose language and mode of expression enable us to form some idea of the sentiments by which our forefathers were animated. Here again we are likely to be disappointed. For we do not find any indications of that enthusiastic patriotism, that desire for liberty, that hatred of the foreign ruler, which we are accustomed to attribute to those times: only evasions of military service, attempts at release from odious taxes, or refusals to take the oath of allegiance to the colonial government. Still if we consider their antecedents, we will find abundant reasons to account for all this.

Nearly all of foreign birth, reared under the severe and warlike sceptre of Frederick the Great, accustomed all their days to monarchical manners and government, they could not be in sympathy with what they regarded as rebellion and unbridled license, or with a government by and for the people, as opposed to the divine right of kings to rule. Hence we find that in spite of various and repeated summons to them to appear at court and take the new oath of allegiance, these calls were always evaded, either by petitions for postponement, or by simply absenting themselves from the judicially appointed place. So strictly were they convinced of the correctness and probity of such a course of action, that the Elders' Conference of Nazareth, having learned upon one occasion that a certain communicant member of the congregation had secretly taken the oath, immediately ordered that, although each one was permitted to follow his own inclination in the matter, yet whoever took the oath would not be allowed to continue a communicant member of the congregation and as such participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

This sentiment seems to have been shared by the members themselves, and appears to have reached its height when on September 16th, 1778, a summons came from Allentown, more peremptory than usual; the record says, "*alle Brüder wie ein Mann declarirten sich den Test nicht zu nehmen.*" And yet, towards the close of the year 1778, they did succeed, in combination with the other Pennsylvania congregations, and under the able leadership of Bro. Ettwein of Bethlehem, in having the requirements of the law partly modified, partly suspended temporarily in their favor by the General Assembly. That they ever took the oath of allegiance does not appear from the record; but as the war drew to a close, and the hopelessness of the royal cause became evident, they gradually accommodated themselves to the new laws and requirements.

They were consistent in their opposition, for no hardship could compel them to take an oath of fealty which they considered an evidence of rebellion against the laws of God and of their rightful rulers. An act was offered in the Assembly in December, 1777, ordering the confiscation of the property of those who refused to subscribe to the Test Act. In October, 1779, the same class of unwilling subjects was threatened with the loss of the rights of citizenship for the same cause. But these threats (and such they

happily remained) did not change their determination. Nor were they alone in the stand they had taken; for it is recorded under date of April 4th, 1778, that twelve brethren from Emmaus were imprisoned at Easton on bread and water fare until the 29th of the same month, because they refused to take the test oath. The same infliction was visited upon thirteen others of the same place on September 22d of the same year. How the brethren of Nazareth escaped a similar fate, especially after passing the resolution of September 16th, 1778, above referred to, is difficult to understand. The brethren in Bethlehem, being in more constant and intimate communication with the civil government, yielded to the force of circumstances much earlier and with a better grace than the brethren at Nazareth. A very serious inconvenience the latter had to endure on this account was the circuitous route they had to take to communicate with the brethren at Hope, New Jersey. As all who refused to take the oath of fealty were not allowed to go further in that direction than Easton, recourse was had to some of the ferries and fords along the upper portion of the Delaware River. Considerable watchfulness was necessary to elude the guards stationed there. During the earlier years of the war, members from Bethlehem also traveled by this route. The intelligence brought back was always to the effect that the brethren at Hope also steadfastly refused to take the new oath, though their proximity to the scene of actual hostilities should have rendered such a course the least advisable.

It happened but seldom that troops were quartered here, though soldiers destined for the army, or prisoners captured in battle frequently passed through; sometimes they remained twenty-four or forty-eight hours. These generally had quarters assigned them in the large barn in Old Nazareth or in the woods near by, and, on one occasion, in the Hall (December 16th and 17th, 1776). Frequently among the prisoners were found men from the same German or Hessian provinces from which some of the inhabitants of the place had emigrated. No wonder, then, that prisoners at least seldom fared badly here. Many of these, especially in 1776 and 1777, came from Albany, Ticonderoga, or posts near there; the prisoners were on the way to Bethlehem and Reading,—the soldiers to join the main army in Jersey. Christian's Spring shared the burden with Nazareth, being at that time on the main

road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. In September, 1777, the occupation of the place by wounded and prisoners was threatened, but it never came to pass.¹ Foragers in goodly numbers, mostly cavalry, were encamped (living in tents) near by and at Christian's Spring and Friedensthal from September 26th to November 23d, 1777, much to the alarm of the peaceloving inhabitants of these settlements. They were, however, not greatly molested by the strangers.

In December, 1777 and January, 1778, requisitions for blankets and clothes for the army were made here and at Gnadenthal and Christian's Spring, and willingly fulfilled.

On December 20th, 1776 the militia of Mt. Bethel, and on January 4th, 1777, those from Wyoming passed through the town. During the year 1777 no troops remained in the town overnight. In 1779 (Feb. 18th to 20th), one hundred and fifty of Pulaski's division were lodged in the town (in the Old Nazareth barn); on the first and last days of their stay, they desired to have a sermon preached to them, to which request Bro. Lembke gladly acceded; he spoke with unusual earnestness and power, and to the great delight of the troops. A number of the members of the congregation were also present. The services were held in the church.

In July, 1778, many refugees from Wyoming arrived, bringing news of devastations, by hostile Indians seven or eight miles away, and inducing fears of an attack on the town; but these apprehensions were groundless, and no incursion followed.

The Brethren considered their chief duty to be to live a quiet and peaceable life, and therefore they scrupulously refrained from rendering any military service during the entire war. When, at last, they were notified by judicial process issued from Easton, that unless all above sixteen years of age presented themselves there on a certain day for military duty, they would be taxed to a certain amount,² and after the last of several successive attempts at post-

¹ Three houses were, however, put in readiness for the occupation, viz.: those occupied by the brethren Weinert, Oesterlein and Fritsche. During the same month (September 20th), six brethren came from Bethlehem to Christian's Spring to make room for the wounded at the former place.

² £3 10s for every man from 16 to 50 years of age. The tax was collected on May 22d, 1777, by a collector (Mr. Lival by name), accompanied by seven armed men.

ponement had failed,—they finally determined rather to pay the tax than perform military duty. Even until after the close of the war, the governing board held the members of the congregation strictly to this course of action. When through the depreciation of the currency (its value being sometimes in the ratio of 100 dollars continental currency for one dollar gold²), money became very dear and scarce, and it was learned that all that had to be done was to respond to their names as they were called, quite a number of the Single Brethren repaired secretly to Easton to present themselves with the Battalion, and thus escape the payment of the tax. They were detected, reprimanded for leaving the Brethren's House without permission, and some were suspended, others excluded from communicant membership. Those who were too poor to pay the tax, were helped from the general fund (probably of the Nazareth Diacony). Under date of October 10th, 1782, it is recorded that money had been received from the Brethren in Europe towards the defrayal of this militia tax. What was still wanting at that time was made up by the congregation. Thus, though debt at one time stared them in the face, they succeeded in paying everything. In order to curtail expenses, the evening services were frequently held in summer at six, in winter at five o'clock.

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that they were greatly displeased when, in April, 1786, the "Battalion Drill" was ordered to take place at Nazareth, near the hotel. Certain brethren were appointed, whose duty it was to keep a strict watch on the Single Brethren on that day, lest they should fall in line with the rest.

They were full of faith that the Lord was with them. Many a time, as summons after summons for military service reached them, did they ask the Lord for advice by means of the lot, and the answer was invariably of the following character,—this answer having been transmitted by Bro. Ettwein from Bethlehem for the comfort of the Brethren here, as it had reassured the Brethren there,—“The Lord approves rather that we for the present do nothing in this matter.” And the Lord in whom they trusted helped them through most wonderfully. Their crops, their main

² In 1780, the mission collection of \$525, currency, was equal to £16, hard money; in 1781, a similar collection of \$1310, currency, was equal to 7 shillings, hard money.

support, never failed them during these troublous times, and they went in and out in peace.

The general tenor of their belief is fully indicated in an address by Bro. Ettwein to the congregation at Christian's Spring in the year 1777, to the effect that "their main work was to serve the Lord, and that nothing should be allowed to interfere with their allegiance to Him, or to sever their intimate connection with Him as their only Saviour. In order to do this, they should keep themselves aloof from all political excitement," &c., &c.

Many were the admonitions and warnings given to the young men against indulging in the profanity and intemperate habits of the officers who were frequently quartered in the Brethren's House. But in spite of these warnings, the vice of intemperance spread rapidly, liquor being even brought into the Brethren's House and consumed there, with deplorable results. These occurrences caused the Elders' Conference of the congregation to hold many anxious consultations and to offer many earnest prayers in behalf of the Single Brethren who had been led astray. Gradually, however, the evil abated.

The Fast Days ordered by the General Government, at least once, sometimes twice every year from 1775 to 1783, were scrupulously observed; in the morning there was an appropriate sermon, in the afternoon reading of mission reports or one of Zinzendorf's sermons, in the evening generally a "*Singstunde*." Whenever the day appointed was a weekday, work was in great measure suspended.

In 1776 great trouble was experienced in getting the *Gemein Nachrichten* from Germany, and in 1777 no *Loosungen* were received. As a substitute, the old ones were used over again.

The town was frequently visited by men prominent in civil and military affairs, though it was not as much favored in that respect as Bethlehem. Bro. Ettwein several times brought members of the Assembly from Bethlehem to this place, who invariably expressed their astonishment at finding so orderly a community in the midst of the wilderness. Generals Sullivan, Schuyler and Gates, also paid visits to the town at various periods. The latter was here several times, remaining once with his family overnight. Other visitors were the French minister (Nov. 26th, 1778), and Gov. John Penn, (May 1st, 1781).